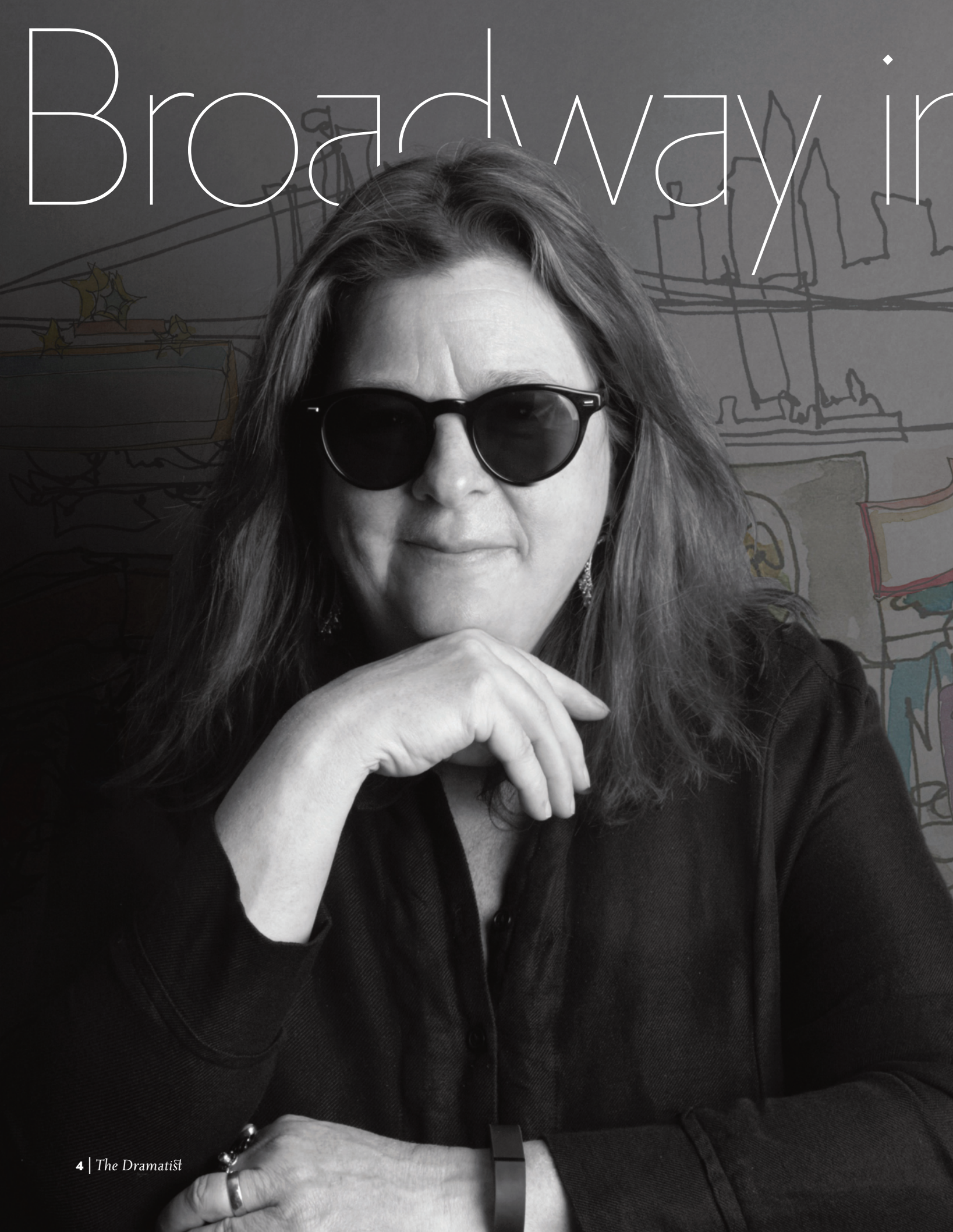


Broadway in





n Review

by Theresa Rebeck

So let's talk about this Broadway season. There were some great shows, and there were some stinkers, and there was a lot in between, just like any season

on Broadway. There were new plays, and revivals, and musicals. There were jukebox musicals, and biopic musicals and musicals based on movies—there were actually a good number of those. There were movie stars and TV stars, and straight up theater stars.

What there wasn't a lot of, was women. In the fall, we saw two revivals of *Richard III* and *Twelfth Night* running in rep, done as they would have been done in Shakespeare's time—without women on that stage. Fair enough. But around the block we saw two other plays running in rep—*Waiting for Godot*, and *No Man's Land*. Both these plays also boasted all male casts. *Bronx Bombers* showed up, another all male cast. The Scottish play, up at Lincoln Center, the witches were men. I guess because they needed some more men,

because the cast was only standing at about 25 men already. Oh, and the two women who are left, in that sea of men? Guess what. They kill them.

Rocky showed up in the spring, with a cast that had women in it—eight, to its 22 men. *All the Way*, the LBJ biography starring Bryan Cranston, also had 22 men—and three women. *Casa Valentina*, seven men, one woman. *Hedwig*, five men, one woman. *A Time to Kill* had fourteen men and four women. *Of Mice and Men?* nine men and one woman. And guess what (spoiler alert) they kill her.

Perhaps Broadway producers actually think this is what the world looks like. It certainly is what the world looks like behind the scenes. Of the ten new plays presented this season there were none written by women. On the musical side of things, life was a shred better. There were 47 bookwriters/composers and lyricists whose work was seen this season. Of that 47, six were women.

Overall if you put all those numbers together, and multiply and divide the way you're supposed to you come up with 10.7 percent. So, of all the Dramatists Guild members working on Broadway this season, 10.7 percent were women, and 89.3 percent were men. Of all the new plays produced on Broadway, 100 percent were written by white men, and zero percent were written by women of any color. 100 percent men, zero percent women.

Meanwhile, it seems that women are coming to Broadway to see plays and musicals in record numbers. In *The New York Times* March 29, 2014, ("In Audiences on Broadway, Fewer Guys Among the Dolls") Patrick Healy informs us that 68 percent of the Broadway audience is women and 32 percent is men. Broadway attendance is down in general, though. So guess who everyone is trying to lure into those seats? Why that's right: MEN.

"Women drive Broadway sales," Healy reports. "Though successful shows often depend on them to wrangle their husbands or boyfriends." Say what? "Successful shows often depend?" Honestly that sounds a little like CNN, where the newscasters keep telling me that the debris in the ocean may or may not be wreckage from that poor lost plane.

Let's not quibble. To me, the important part of



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that whole article really does seem to be the part where everyone acknowledges "women drive Broadway sales." Women drive Broadway sales! Men are falling by the wayside but women are loyal fans!

But wait. "Women are the low-hanging fruit," says publicist Michele Groner.

Gay men—the article goes on to explain—are considered "a reliable Broadway demographic." But women? They're "low-hanging fruit."

Is this related to the question of why Broadway remains so entrenched in an inability to actually hire women writers? It's possible. "Women are low hanging fruit" sounds like you've got them anyway, so you don't have to hire them or program for them. Even when the programming is there, the creative positions are not. As of now, the few shows that are clearly geared toward that female audience are written by men, by the same heavily skewed percentages. Even when they look to program to women, producers hire men.

It's like politics, or Wall Street, or corporate headquarters. The closer you get to power and money, the more the women get shoved aside.

Let me tell you something: I have worked on Broadway, and it's great. It is astonishing to see audiences gathering from all corners of America, and the world. They're not stupid either; anyone who disdains our audiences needs to have his or her head examined. These are people who take time out of their lives and pay a lot of money to see the wonder of theater presented to them by the best actors around. They're there for the show, and they don't want to be just entertained: they want to be provoked, and surprised, and moved.

LEFT: The Broadway production of *All The Way* by Robert Schenkkan
BELOW: The Broadway production of *Rocky* book by Sylvester Stallone
& Thomas Meehan, lyrics by Lynn Ahrens, music by Stephen Flaherty
RIGHT: The Broadway production of *Bronx Bombers* by Eric Simonson.

JOAN MARCUS



Working on Broadway was fantastic, and women should want to do it. I want to do it again. I want things to be more fair, so I have a better chance at doing it again. So let's not mistake the fact that I definitely have skin in this game. But I also do really think that stories should be told to the culture by women as well as men. I think the stories we are hearing are much too skewed toward the male perspective. I think the story of America must be told by its men and its women, as well as the astonishing array of cultural voices that are America. I love our diversity. And I believe that everyone's story connects to everyone else's. I believe theater provides a powerful way for us to see and hear each other. I believe it presents lessons in empathy, which the world badly needs right now.

So I'm not advocating that we call in the p.c. police and say that men can't write about women, or that women can't write about men, or that white people can't write about black people, or that black people can't write about Southeast Asians. That would be horrible, and I don't want to live in that world. But it does seem that in times like these—where Broadway audiences are shrinking, and women are the demographic that's sticking around—it is good common sense to invite women artists to the table. Especially since 10.7 percent participation looks less like an oversight and a little bit more like discrimination. Which is, frankly, offensive.

In the hilarious and lively comment stream that

accompanied the *Times* piece, many readers noted that they didn't go to the theater anymore because it is too expensive and the seats are too small. Also, they are tired of musicals that don't have fun songs, and they are tired of musicals based on movies.

And, they wish there were more good new plays. (I'm not making that up.)

So even if the goal is get those straight men back in those seats, the way to do that would be lower ticket prices, make the seats bigger, and do more good plays. At least, that's the solution proposed by the men and women who cared enough to read the *Times* article and respond. I liked this response, so I'm going to call it "a study." Numbers to come.

In any event, I hope our producers take their advice. And I hope they start to care more about the wonderful, smart, curious theater-goers who happen to be women, and the women who are poised to tell them stories. Trust me, the National Hockey League doesn't spend a ton of time trying to get women through the doors. Especially when attendance is down. Oh forget it, not even when attendance is up. They care about the audience they have. We should, too.

This year, women completely dominated the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. And, at a time when Disney found its inner feminist with the spectacular animated feature *Frozen* (songs penned by our own Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Bobby Lopez), Broadway seemed wearily behind the times. 